United Nations DP/2015/30

Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services

Distr.: General
15 July 2015

Original: English

Second regular session 2015
31 August - 4 September 2015, New York
Item 6 of the provisional agenda
Evaluation

Management response to the thematic evaluation of the UNDP contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment (2008-2013)

Context and background

1. Gender equality and women's empowerment are global commitments emerging from the world conferences of the 1990s and first decade of the twenty-first century, including the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals and their reviews; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference for Women (1995) and its subsequent reviews; and more recently, the sustainable development goals, expected to be adopted later in 2015.

2. Within this context, UNDP adopted its first gender equality strategy for the period 2008-2013. The strategy aimed to: (a) develop capacities, in country and in house, to integrate gender concerns into all programmes and practice areas; (b) provide gender-responsive policy advisory services that promote gender equality and women's empowerment in all focus areas, including in-country programmes, planning instruments and sector-wide programmes; and (c) support specific interventions that benefit women and scale up innovative models. Through the strategy, innovations such as the Gender Steering and Implementation Committee (GSIC) and the gender marker were created to ensure accountability for gender equality results.

3. In 2014 and early 2015, the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) conducted a thematic evaluation of the contribution of UNDP to gender equality and women's empowerment. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

(a) assess the contributions of UNDP to gender equality and women's empowerment during the period 2008-2013;

(b) assess the extent to which the gender equality strategy functioned as an integrating dimension in the implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2008-2013;

15-12043 (E) 210715

Please recycle

(c) provide actionable recommendations of relevance to the implementation of the current UNDP gender equality strategy, 2014–2017. In addition, it is expected that the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation will be of relevance with respect to the formulation of the next strategic plan and gender strategy.

4. The evaluation covered the period 2008-2013. The UNDP management response (see annex) encompasses practical and time-bound key actions which build on ongoing work and designates the parties responsible for these actions.

Overview of the methodology

5. UNDP management welcomes the evaluation as it provides useful recommendations and a forward-looking assessment drawn from the UNDP role in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment to inform the organization's implementation of its gender equality strategy, 2014-2017.

6. UNDP management recognizes that the methodology of the evaluation combines evaluative evidence and country studies. UNDP management also recognizes that the evaluation relied on mixed methods and a variety of data collection sources to validate, analyse and triangulate gender mainstreaming and gender equality and women's empowerment results.

7. UNDP management welcomes the evaluation's findings and conclusions as encouraging and useful.

8. During the period 2008-2013, considerable investments were made in the development of institutional innovations, some of which are now recognized standards within the United Nations system. These include the GSIC, the gender marker, the Gender Equality Seal certification initiative and the gender parity strategy. UNDP had met or exceeded 80 per cent of all performance indicators of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP) by 2013 and according to the results and analysis of UNDP 2013 UN-SWAP results reporting provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "UNDP results demonstrate that it continues to be a leader for gender equality and women's empowerment within the United Nations system". The analysis also noted that "in particular, UNDP distinguishes itself as a role model in resource allocation and tracking, strategic planning, monitoring and reporting, and organizational culture". UNDP recognizes that these tools require continuous improvement and welcomes the recommendations made by the evaluation.

9. In addition, while UNDP recognizes gender parity at senior management levels and in the organizational culture to be an ongoing challenge, as has been highlighted in findings 19 and 20 of the evaluation, UNDP management feels that it is important to highlight progress made in achieving gender balance, in particular with regard to the percentage of female resident coordinators/resident representatives, which was 40 per cent in 2014, up from 36 per cent in 2012, and the increase in the percentage of women nominated by UNDP for the resident coordinator/resident representative assessments (57 per cent in 2014, up from 40 per cent in 2012). The percentage of women among country directors also increased, to 46 per cent in 2014 from 42 per cent in 2012.

Findings and conclusions

10. UNDP management welcomes conclusion 1 that there has been far-reaching change and a marked improvement in the UNDP approach and implementation of policies to address gender mainstreaming. Management appreciates the recognition that UNDP has moved beyond the 'islands of success' identified in the findings of the first evaluation of UNDP gender equality work in 2005. As the evaluation noted, over the period 2008-2013, UNDP invested considerable effort in raising awareness of gender mainstreaming and developing tools to advance UNDP as a gender-aware organization.

11. UNDP management also agrees that corporate messaging needs to be followed up with adequate resources as was indicated in conclusion 2. It is worth noting that earlier downward trends in funding of the Gender Unit have been reversed and, as a result of the structural change, UNDP has put in place a core cadre of gender experts with a total of 22 positions created at headquarters and regional service centres. This is augmented by seven positions in other professional homes based at the regional service centres and 14 gender advisers in country offices as of 2014. UNDP management recognizes that the organization's current financial situation has made acquisition of sufficient gender expertise an ongoing challenge and will continue to work towards fulfilling the agreed targets on gender expertise, particularly the investment in gender capacities in country offices with annual budgets greater than $25 million. However, looking forward, UNDP management remains persuaded of the importance of gender expertise for policy development and programme support, standard setting and quality assurance. Management also remains concerned about the formerly sufficient but currently declining levels of earmarked donor funding to sustain the gender cadre, and reduced government cost-sharing for gender programming. This may affect the quality, speed and intensity of implementation of the UNDP gender equality strategy.

12. UNDP management recognizes the need to move towards a more resilient gender equality agenda and increase transformational change and agrees with the notion that "...moving to transformational results is context-specific, takes time and requires a long-term programming perspective and approaches to monitoring, assessment and learning..." as is indicated in both conclusions 3 and 4. The evaluation also drew attention to the "complexity" of gender programming, noting that "complexity" is intrinsic to such programming which address issues that are deeply rooted in cultural mores, values and beliefs and where much of the achievement of results is dependent on factors outside the control of UNDP. Management supports this conclusion.

13. The evaluation found in conclusion 5 that "UNDP has yet to develop a firm corporate policy that ensures gender analysis is a mandatory requirement in all programming". This conclusion should be contextualized for the period 2008-2013. Since then, UNDP has ensured that gender equality concerns are integrated into all stages of the programme/project cycle. There is now a mandatory screening for all UNDP projects at the stages of design, monitoring and closure, which is integrated in the new corporate project quality assurance policy that will be fully in place by January 2016. The UNDP social and environmental screening procedure, introduced in 2014, is also a mandatory project-level screening requirement which aims to minimize or offset the potentially adverse environmental and social impacts of UNDP development work. The screening

checklist requires all projects to address specific questions related to the project's gender equality impact and ensure engagement with women prior to the projects' approval. Specific tools are also being developed for gender mainstreaming in vertical funds such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

14. The evaluation also concluded that the gender marker needs further refinements and a more consistent application. Management acknowledges the need for better gender analysis and consistent gender marker practice. Work is already underway to improve the use of the gender marker and other tools, processes and reporting mechanisms with more emphasis on gender analysis, random assessment and checks.

15. UNDP management takes note of conclusion 6 concerning gender parity within the UNDP workforce and recognizes the need for a more holistic approach. Work is under way to further refresh the gender parity strategy with a view to improving gender balance at middle and senior management levels, reduce gender gaps in staff engagement and empowerment and ensure a gender-sensitive and inclusive working environment. The refreshed gender parity strategy will include: provisions to work with leaders to enhance the gender inclusiveness of the UNDP workplace; initiatives to identify and support the advancement of high-potential women (e.g., based on the previous successful experience with similar programmes in the regional bureaux for Africa and for Asia and the Pacific); affirmative action measures to increase the percentage of women in middle and especially senior management positions; and measures to increase the accountability of managers for the attainment of gender parity in their respective offices.

16. The conclusion that "gender parity is generally reported at the aggregate level both at the regional and headquarters levels, which may obscure a more differentiated picture of the situation in individual country offices and units", should be contextualized. While formal reporting to the Executive Board and internally to GSIC is indeed at the aggregate level, rich analysis has been completed for individual bureaux and offices, professions, grades, etc. and is used to guide corporate and individual office actions.

17. UNDP acknowledges the conclusion relating to the UNDP partnership with UN-Women. The gender equality strategy, 2014-2017 has affirmed the importance of a strengthened partnership between UNDP and UN-Women, as well as with other international development partners, within and outside the United Nations system, to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. This is based on an agreement that the division of labour between both agencies will be tailored according to the capacities and resources at the national level through the work of gender thematic groups. Both agencies are committed to work towards scaling up joint initiatives and joint thought leadership. UNDP welcomes stronger partnership with UN-Women at all levels.

Annex. Key recommendations and the management response

Recommendation 1. UNDP should align its resources and programming with its corporate message on the centrality of supporting gender equality and women's empowerment as a means to 'fast forward' development results. Gender mainstreaming should also go beyond providing sex-disaggregated data for all results areas of the Strategic Plan. In this connection, the merits of integrating the gender equality strategy as part of the next strategic plan (2018 onwards) should receive serious consideration.

Management response:

The UNDP Strategic Plan, 2014-2017 has strongly integrated gender equality across its Integrated Results and Resource Framework (IRRF). In addition to a dedicated outcome for accelerating gender equality, it has mainstreamed gender equality across all other outcomes. The new gender equality strategy, 2014-2017 is an accompaniment to the Strategic Plan and looks at how to mainstream gender in all outcomes of the plan. The strategy, which was approved by the Executive Board, has made financial and human resource commitments to ensure that gender mainstreaming is adequately resourced. This includes as a principal objective meeting the United Nations system-wide financial target of allocating 15 per cent of the organization's resources towards gender equality by 2017. The gender marker is tracking UNDP investments on gender and is aligned to UN-SWAP principles and standards. The gender marker is now being used as an accountability tool in the GSIC to track progress towards the 15 per cent target. UNDP will integrate the 15 per cent financial commitment into the guidelines for trust fund allocations, work with IEO to improve their evaluation of gender outcomes and draw on the gender marker findings. The merits of integrating the gender equality strategy into the next strategic plan (2018 onwards) will be considered as part of the midterm review of the current Strategic Plan, 2014-2017. Additionally, new quality assurance tools are being developed to ensure that gender analysis is integrated in all country programmes and programme documents. The text under this recommendation also suggested that UNDP strengthen its work on the crisis prevention and recovery and energy and environment focus areas. Tools and work processes will be developed (please refer to the key actions below) to address this recommendation.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
1.1 UNDP will expand the GSIC forum to include all central and regional bureaux, the Human Development Report Office and all professional homes, and utilize tools such as the gender marker to monitor compliance with corporate mandates and resource targets. The gender marker data will be broken down by region and Strategic Plan outcomes and outputs to be a more precise monitoring tool. The gender marker data will also be incorporated into the corporate planning system. Improvements will be made to the gender marker to improve accuracy (please see key actions under recommendation 3).	By December 2016	Executive Office, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS)/ Gender Team, regional bureaux		
1.2 The merits of integrating the gender equality strategy into the strategic plan from 2018 onwards will be considered based on findings of the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan, 2014-2017.	By December 2017	Executive Office		

1.3 UNDP standard operating procedures in crisis contexts, surge and express staff rosters (terms of reference, capacities, training) and crisis response tools all are being reviewed to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment can be addressed at the onset of crises.	By June 2016	BPPS/Gender Team, Crisis Response Unit		
1.4 To support the integration of gender in energy and environment programming, UNDP will develop: (a) a toolkit for UNDP staff on mainstreaming gender in environment programming; (b) a gender toolkit for GEF projects; and (c) tools for integrating gender into disaster preparedness and response.	By December 2016	BPPS/Gender Team, BPPS/Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Team		
Recommendation 2. Given the uneven performance in the four focus areas of the Strategic Plan, 2008-2013 in promoting gender development results, UNDP should ensure that future assessments pay specific attention to the progress, effectiveness and quality of gender development results in the seven outcome areas of the current Strategic Plan.				
Management response: UNDP welcomes this recommendation and will develop guidelines for integrating gender development results in thematic assessments including reviews, and will work with IEO to improve the integration of gender in all evaluations.				
2.1 Guidelines for integrating gender in reviews, assessments, decentralized and independent evaluations (drawing on existing tools including the IRRF, gender marker, etc.,) will be developed.	By December 2016	BPPS/Gender Team, IEO		
Recommendation 3. UNDP should focus on refining tools, instruments and processes developed during the period 2008-2013 and focus on further internalizing the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment to the achievement of all development goals among staff. Specific recommendations on these improvements and possible new areas of intervention are discussed below: **3.1. Gender analysis should become mandatory in all programming and be linked with justifying the gender marker rating of each UNDP intervention.** **3.2. The gender marker should track allocations in a way that provides reliable aggregated data at different stages of the project cycle. It should be subject to random external checks and also be systematically assessed by internal audit exercises.** **3.3. The Gender Seal requires senior management's attention in terms of its future role as a corporate certification initiative.** **3.4. Stronger attention should be placed on using the GSIC forum as a venue for organization-wide learning, problem-solving and sharing of instructive practices.** **3.5. UNDP should strengthen capacity development processes that focus on gender mainstreaming so they are relevant and apply to staff's daily work and needs** **3.6. UNDP should consider exploring new frontiers for engaging in gender issues that go beyond women's issues, for example the 'masculinity' agenda.**				

Management response:

UNDP management appreciates the recognition of past efforts, and notes that UNDP will continue to refine tools, instruments and processes with a focus on internalizing gender equality and women's empowerment towards the achievement of development goals.

3.1. Gender analysis should become mandatory in all programming and be linked with justifying the gender marker rating of each UNDP intervention.

UNDP will ensure that gender analysis is linked with the gender marker rating of every UNDP intervention by integrating this analysis in existing and upcoming mandatory programme/project planning, monitoring and assessment processes such as programme/project quality assurance, social and environmental screening and revision of the project document.

3.2 The gender marker should track allocations in a way that provides reliable aggregated data at different stages of the project cycle. It should be subject to random external checks and also be systematically assessed by internal audit exercises.

UNDP welcomes this recommendation and will include in the revised gender marker guidance note provisions for random assessments and integrated into internal audit exercises.

3.3 The Gender Seal requires senior management's attention in terms of its future role as a corporate certification initiative. To facilitate this process, the Gender Seal pilot should be assessed by a team of independent advisors to guide its application as it enters a critical post-pilot phase.

Management appreciates the recognition that the Gender Equality Seal approach can be of value to national ministries. UNDP welcomes and agrees with the recommendation for independent assessments to review, document and improve upon the experiences of the Gender Equality Seal.

3.4 Stronger attention should be placed on using the GSIC forum as a venue for organization-wide learning, problem-solving and sharing of instructive practices.

UNDP appreciates the recommendation for the GSIC to become a venue for learning, finding solutions and sharing of practices. UNDP has expanded the membership of the GSIC and for the first time in 2015, all UNDP bureaux reported gender equality progress and results, shared lessons learned and identified overall and bureau-specific recommendations to take forward.

3.5 UNDP should strengthen capacity development processes that focus on gender mainstreaming so they are relevant and apply to staff's daily work and needs.

UNDP agrees on the importance of capacity development for gender mainstreaming and will improve existing and upcoming training tools by including gender content.

3.6 UNDP should consider exploring new frontiers for engaging in gender issues that go beyond women's issues, for example the 'masculinity' agenda.

UNDP will consider exploring new frontiers for engaging in gender issues that go beyond women's issues, for example the 'masculinity' agenda.

3.1.1. Mandatory environmental and social screening procedures established for all projects above $500,000 to ensure they have gender equality as a key principal.	Continuous	BPPS/Gender Team, BPPS/Development Impact Team, regional bureaux and regional service centres		
3.1.2. Gender analysis is a requirement of the mandatory project quality assurance process.	Continuous			
3.1.3. Quality assurance guidelines for all country programmes and global/regional programmes will address gender equality and women's empowerment.	By December 2016			

3.2.1. The gender marker guidance note will be revised to provide more specific guidance to improve gender marker accuracy.	By December 2016	BPPS/Gender Team		
3.2.2. The gender marker rating will be included in the cover note for project documents and integrated in the quality assurance guidelines.	By December 2016	BPPS/Gender Team, BPPS/Development Impact Group		
3.2.3. A sample of random gender marker audits will be undertaken each year to improve accuracy (ensuring regional balance).	By December 2016	BPPS/Gender Team, regional bureaux		
3.2.4. Guidelines for integrating gender in reviews, assessments, evaluations and audits (drawing on existing tools including IRRF, gender marker, etc.) will be developed.	By December 2016	BPPS/IEO/Office of Audit and Investigations		
3.3. Independent assessment will be undertaken of the Gender Equality Seal to review, document and improve the tool.	By June 2016	BPPS/Gender Team		
3.4.1 The GSIC will continue to be strengthened with all bureaux reporting. Accountability tools such as the gender marker, results-oriented annual report data and gender parity data will inform the GSIC meetings. GSIC recommendations will be presented to the Executive Group and they will be reviewed for implementation by the GSIC.	Continuous	All UNDP		
3.4.2 GSIC will refresh the UNDP gender parity strategy with a view to achieving a more holistic approach to gender parity issues in UNDP.	By November 2015	GSIC, with support from Office of Human Resources		
3.5 UNDP to review and improve training tools for policy and programme staff on gender mainstreaming in programming, monitoring and reporting with greater focus on improving capacity for gender analysis, accuracy and consistency in gender marker ratings and gender in areas of profession.	By December 2016	BPPS/Gender Team		

3.6 UNDP to undertake research on 'masculinities' to better understand the linkages between masculinities and gender inequality, specifically gender-based violence.	By December 2016	BPPS/Gender Team, Regional Bureau for Asia Pacific		
Recommendation 4. Country offices should prepare gender plans that identify gaps and needs in terms of technical support, capacity-building, joint action and advocacy and collective monitoring that facilitate stronger gender programming. These plans should also help to identify areas where UNDP can draw on expertise and leverage the existing capacities of other United Nations agencies active on gender issues at the country level. This process should be supported, monitored and reported upon by the respective regional bureaux to the GSIC on annual basis.				
Management response: The Gender Equality Seal certification is the primary tool for strengthening country office capacity and ensuring collective monitoring for stronger gender programming. Currently, 29 countries have undertaken the Gender Seal certification process. This will be expanded to more countries. Regional bureaux and the GSIC will draw upon the GSIC benchmarking to measure progress.				
4.1 The Gender Equality Seal benchmarking to be completed by all country offices in Africa and utilized as a tool for monitoring gender capacity.	By December 2015	BPPS/Gender Team/ Regional Bureau for Africa		
4.2 The next phase of the Gender Equality Seal certification initiative will be launched with approximately 30 country offices being certified.	By December 2016	BPPS/Gender Team/ regional bureaux and country offices		
Recommendation 5. UNDP currently does not have a measurement standard to systematically track the type, quality and effectiveness of its contribution to gender results that also captures the context of change and the degree of its contribution to that change. In order to address this issue, UNDP should codify the way it wishes to monitor, report, evaluate and audit its contributions to gender and this framework should be used for rigorously tracking results for gender equality and women's empowerment at the country, regional and global levels.				
Management response: UNDP believes that it has a range of tools for measuring progress that are used for different purposes. These comply with a range of different inter-agency standards. Taken together, these give a good view of the gender mainstreaming taking place in a given business unit. However, management will take forward the recommendation to consider adopting measures such as the Gender@Work framework to move beyond a focus on numbers of women and men towards more transformative results is worth consideration.				
5.1. UNDP will begin an internal dialogue bringing experts from the Gender@Work network to explore how the organization can move beyond a focus on numbers of women and men towards more transformative results. This will include the development of a capacity-building strategy to support country offices and accelerate changes.	By December 2016	BPPS/Gender Team		

5.2. In developing its monitoring policy, UNDP will integrate provisions for systematic tracking of the type, quality and effectiveness of its contribution to gender results.	By December 2016	Executive Office, BPPS/Development Impact Group/ Gender Team, regional bureaux		
5.3. UNDP will bring the Gender@Work framework to be discussed at the Gender Steering and Implementation Committee meetings.	By December 2017	Executive Office, BPPS/Gender Team, regional bureaux		
5.4. The feasibility of the Gender@Work framework to become part of the UNDP results-based management policy and processes to be considered in the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, 2013-2017.	By December 2016	Executive Office, BPPS/Development Impact Group		

* The implementation status is tracked in the Evaluation Resource Centre.